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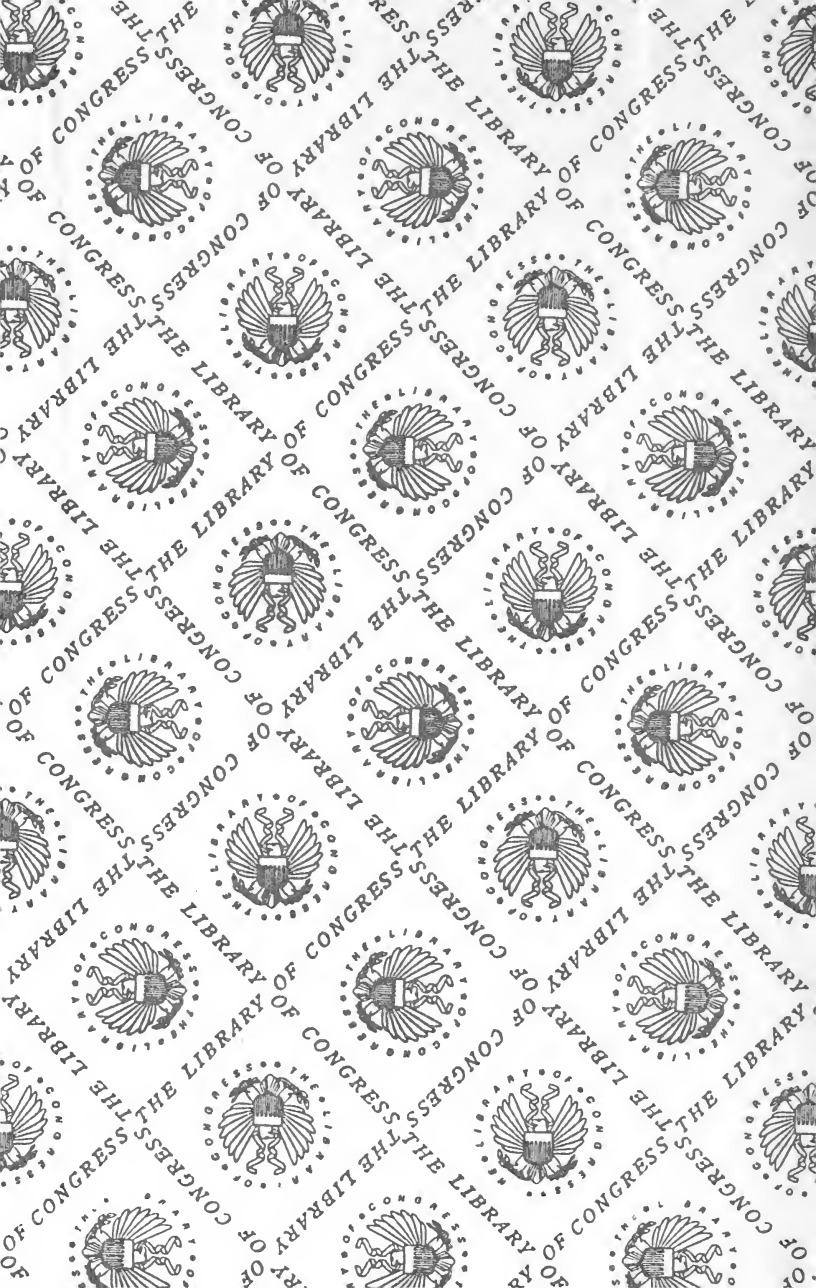
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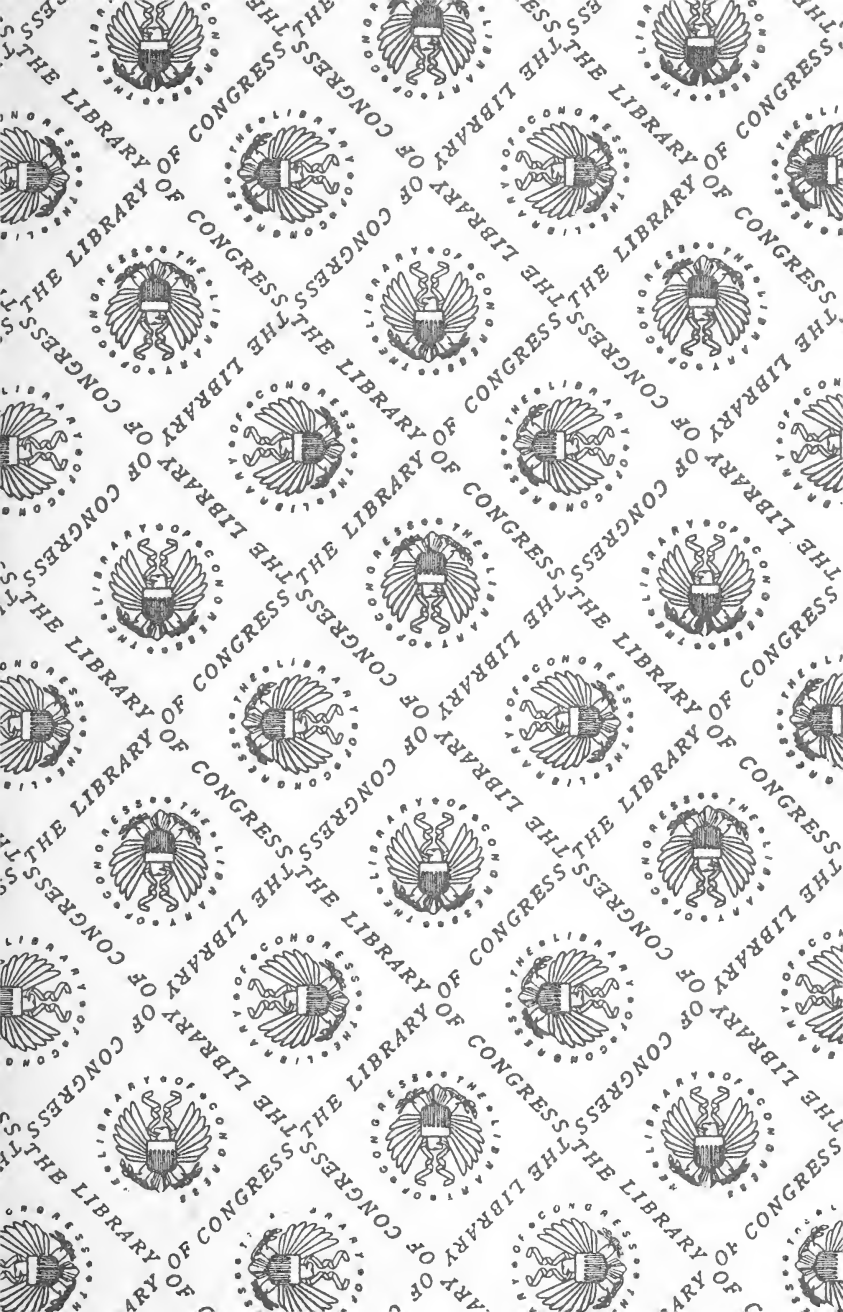
1921

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BILL BORAM

ROBERT NORWOOD

By **ROBERT NORWOOD**

BILL BORAM

THE MAN OF KERIOTH

THE MODERNISTS

THE PIPER AND THE REED

THE WITCH OF ENDOR

HIS LADY OF THE SONNETS

BILL BORAM

BY

ROBERT NORWOOD

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN OF KERIOTH," "THE MODERN-
ISTS," "THE WITCH OF ENDOR," ETC.

WITH A FOREWORD BY
GRACE BLACKBURN

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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
SKIPPER BILL
WHOSE TRANSFIGURATION
LED ME TO THIS POEM

FOREWORD

In this strong and curiously beautiful poem, "Bill Boram," with its rush of tidal waters and its welter of elemental human passions, Mr. Norwood, it seems to my mind, has sought to epitomize the evolution of the spiritual universe, much as the writers of Holy Writ epitomize the evolution of the physical universe in that glorious choric outburst which we call the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.

What matters it if the stage of the latter conflict, in place of embracing as does the former, the round world, the overhanging stars, all visible creation, is confined to the adventure in development of a single human soul? Dare we, indeed, employ the term "confined" to that which no man yet has ever found confinable; or is there aught to do with "great" or "small" in the realm of that which can neither be seen nor handled? "That was not first which is spiritual but that which is natural; and afterwards that which is spiritual" . . . all things, no matter how gross their seeming, tend at the last to "spiritual results." The poet has warranty for his philosophy not in Scripture alone but in the conclusions of the choicest and the

most chosen of the race. For not only is it asked by the prophets what that is which man shall give "in exchange" for the soul, but it is demanded of man how and in what manner he shall weigh or measure that which when put into the balances with the "whole world" shows the world, by comparison, to be as light as a moulted feather.

The physical universe with all its modifications from star-dust to organic life, we assume, had its birth amid convulsions of titanic forces poetically termed "Chaos and old Night," and that at a period of time so remote the contemplation of it staggers the intellect. That universe would now seem to be perfected, in certain details decadent; though with regard to both suppositions the wisest of our scientists consent to hold but a tentative opinion.

The spiritual universe so far at least as it appertains to this planet, we believe to have had its inception at that stupendous moment when physical man first achieved an "inward eye," became conscious not alone of the earth as an environmental fact but of himself as a thinking and an aspiring entity, an entity curious and critical in regard to himself as also to the source and origin of himself . . . God.

This spiritual beginning, we argue, took place at a period comparatively modern—this side a million years—while its perfectability presupposes the throes of an infinity. Is it too much, then, logically to reason that just as the physical universe rose amid a struggle of colossal material forces, so the spiritual universe, in

the dawn of whose day we now dwell, is coming into being amid "groanings that cannot be uttered"?

Our vision of the conflict in which humanity is immersed is myopic, we suffer a false perspective, we see men as trees walking and call their intentions and actions by uncouth and unphilosophic names.

Thus that which we term "sin," it is possible, may be but physical instinct raised to the plane where, by right, spiritual understanding should prevail.

The two great instincts of the animal kingdom, it will be allowed, are the instincts of stomach hunger and of generative hunger. Both these instincts, whether of physical man or of the beasts, are the outcome of and are justified by the analogous instinct of self-preservation by means of which Nature not only protects the individual but by which she maintains the race.

In their proper kingdom stomach hunger and generative hunger have the primal blessing. . . . God saw them and pronounced them "good." Transfer these two hungers from the physical plane to the intellectual plane, however, and it will be seen that they become the impulse of innumerable evils and sub-evils, which we call "sins." Simplicity has here become complexity. The obvious has now passed over into the involved. Matter has acquired the wings of mentality. Result: Not a lust, not a hatred, not a greed, not an obsession, but may be traced to those two originally innocent and constructive instinctive forces—forces which having added to them the efficiency of the intellect and the

enthusiasm of the imagination have enlarged their jurisdiction so as to pervade all consciousness.

Thus stomach hunger developed along the intellectual, becomes that infinitely subtle and deceiving bias, personal ambition—a mental appetite such as is seen in Macbeth—an acquisitive rapacity such as that evidenced by Wilhelm Hohenzollern—ambition which when once given its head is not to be soothed nor satisfied, no, not by the kingdoms of the world nor the glory of them.

Nor are history and experience silent as to the effect produced upon human character and conduct in cases where generative hunger is transferred from the physical to the mental side of being. The great sadists and sensualists whose careers darken the pages of the race's story have oftentimes been men and women of brilliant intellect . . . their "worm" died not because it fed not upon mortal but upon immortal emotions.

These are but the peak waves in that stupendous spiritual chaos across the face of which the Spirit of God is moving to the end that there shall be "Light." The deep beneath the darkness is the Soul . . . the firmament with its stars is the Soul . . . the earth and all that is therein is the Soul . . . a new universe slowly but surely evolving.

And if our poet chooses as the text of his discourse not the grandiose universal Soul, but the soul of the simple fisherman, Bill Boram, that is because Bill Boram is important to the scheme of things, a segment of the All-Whole and the All-Holy, whose final

destiny it is to be made in the "image and likeness" of that God of whom Jesus said that He is "Spirit" . . . and who, thus, could design for Himself none but a spiritual counterpart. . . .

Like Bill's "tubers" humanity is "planted deep." And again like them, it—

"tunnels

Up'ards to meet the light, sartin that some
Place waits for it. . . ."

GRACE BLACKBURN.

PERSONS OF THE STORY

TOM BLAYLOCK—

The Parson's son and mate of the Flying Scud—a whaler caught in the Arctic ice. Tom writes this story of Bill Boram to escape the monotony of the long Northern night, and at the same time to clarify his thinking on "those things which pertain to the Kingdom of God."

BILL BORAM—

Captain of the Lottie S. Bill's points of contact with the Infinite are: His love of flowers and all things that are physically beautiful; some gratitude and feeling of fellowship for George Conrad; a deep respect for Bobby Fox.

THE LOTTIE S.—

Whose spars "a-tap'rin up'ard" told Bill a "sight more'n most o' men" could tell.

PARSON BLAYLOCK—

A strong man with a frozen soul, whose ethical sense has overpowered that charity without which righteousness becomes as the sound of a smitten gong.

KATE COOLIN—

A type of that lure of sex which damns because it is possessive.

GEORGE CONRAD—

The Lottie's cook and Bill's loyal henchman. George is the type of that Love which overcomes

the world and gives its possessor the key to the Kingdom of God.

BOBBY FOX—

The sage of The Cove. He is one of those men one occasionally meets among humble folk, a thinker, a student, and very wise. We know him well and thank God for his kind.

THE SHE WEASEL—

Her type belongs to every community and represents the only personal devil it has been our misfortune to know, if malice is the only sin and we think that it is.

SAM PUBLICOVER—

Rough, uncouth, and yet with a feeling for beauty that makes his homely speech melodious with a poet's gift of phrase. Sam is the local blacksmith whose forge is a frequent resort for the crew of the Lottie S. He is the She Weasel's brother, but here all kinship ends.

JOHNNY DEAL—

A blind fiddler. Johnny, in Sam Publicover's opinion, surpasses Shakespeare who wrote blank verse mainly because "he couldn't keep de jig." We do not agree with Sam's opinion of Shakespeare—Mr. George Bernard Shaw to the contrary.

ORAM HILTZ—

Mate of the Lottie S. Oram, like most of us, has moments of illumination, but is mainly baffled by the mystery of Bill's adventure into the Infinite through his love of beauty.

The Cov'ers, the crew of the Lottie S., Molly—Bill's cow, flowers, birds, and the Spirit Who clothes Himself in the "Light of setting suns."

PART ONE

“I think that those who have an imaginative corner in their hearts are better than those who have not. They have a shrine—to a shrine we bring our aspirations; there they accumulate and secretly influence our lives.”

—*Richard Jeffries.*

BILL BORAM

PART ONE

Bill Boram was the bad man of The Cove
And skipper of the schooner Lottie S.—
A green-hulled cranky craft as ever drove
Her bowsprit into sea foam. I confess
Bill had no beauty, no redeeming grace
Of manner. He was almost always full.
In stature Bill was short and thick. His face
Was not unlike old Aaron Conrad's bull—
The ugliest and the meanest brute I know—
A tangle of red hair above two eyes
Like balls of polished bronze that seemed to glow
With hot hell-fire. Bill's tongue was very wise
In all the art of antique blasphemy;
Art that was old ere out of towered Tyre
Great merchant triremes pushed their prows to sea.
Bill often boasted, "Cuss? I c'n cuss higher
Than pa'son Blaylock aims to p'int a prayer.
Cuss? I c'n cuss the devil out o' hell!"
Bill's whiskers were a fiery fringe of hair

That from his jutting jaws and square chin fell
In curling fury half-way down his breast.

Yet there was virtue in the strength he had,
And cunning, too, that made him first and best
Of fishers from The Cove, though he was bad.
The Lottie S. was always sure to trip
Her anchor ere her sisters made for port,
With Bill blaspheming, "May God damn this ship
An' every bastard sailor, if we's short
O' half a quintal o' the 'customed catch
When we discharges cargo at The Belle. . . .
Tarp'lins there, you lubbers, on the hatch. . . .
Tops'ls. . . . Now let her drive to home or hell!"

The Cove lies partly landlocked from the sea.
Its arms enclose a huddle of white homes
Red-roofed above its shacks and wharves. To me,
Who have grown weary of old temple domes
And minster spires, of castles, gates and walls,
Earth has no beauty like those roofs of red
Against the dark green spruce when twilight falls
Upon The Cove. An island lifts its head
Midway between the shores that curve to form
A nearly oval harbor—quarter-mile
At widest point—where, safe from any storm,
A score of schooners, in the noisy while
Of their unloading cargoes of the catch,
Tug at their anchors. Where the deep Cove ends
In shoals of cobble stones—worn till they match—

A brown brook shallows, deepens, narrows, bends
Tumultuous among the alders, till,
Far back, it turns the wheel that grinds the grist
In Cyrus Jodrey's hopper. On the hill
A steeple lifts the brave appeal of Christ.

"The Cov'ers," as they always have been called,
Are bred of Dutch and Anglo-Saxon stock.
The women go short-kirtled and red-shawled,
Clicking their needles on a gray wool sock
To time their talking. They can bake, weave, hem,
Bear husky babies to the lads they love,
Minding their business as the men mind them:
There are no suffrage squabbles at The Cove.
The men are short, broad-shouldered as a kedge,
With diapason voices of the sea
That breaks in throated thunder on the ledge
Near Dorey's Light. Rough-humored blasphemy
Cuts through their talk, like sudden saw-toothed reefs
At ebb of tide below the Scander Shoals.

Poor Parson Blaylock said they had beliefs
So pagan that he wondered how their souls
Could get to heaven; for he was of that creed
Which limits God and grace to legal quarts
Or gallons; held man is not saved by deed,
But by acceptance of the longs and shorts
In Hebrew written by the Holy Ghost,
Committed to the Church; that he is bound

To burn in hell forever with the lost
Who has not by his faith salvation found.

Where Scander Bay turns in to meet The Cove,
And where the road runs down to Dorey's Head,
Bill's house stands. Though he liked to rant and rove
With rum and cronies, it was often said,
"Bill at his best is when Bill's at his home."
Good reason why; for deep in his bad heart
There lived a love for one black patch of loam
That was his garden. Bill was first to start
His hoeing, first to plant, before he sailed
Off in the green-hulled schooner Lottie S.

On certain noons when black North-easters flailed
The Grand Banks like a floor, and the duress
Of flailing made the sea a field of foam,
Bill thought of daisies down behind the barn,
And Molly tinkling up the cow-path home.

Yes, home was sweet to Bill, and he would yarn
O' nights above the bottle with his mate
About old Molly: "That God-blasted cow
Knows more'n most o' the crew; airly or late,
She schemes an' plans. . . . Oram, I wonders how
The corn is growin'. . . . They's a patch of blue
Hard by the fence, below the granite rock
Bill Dorey blasted, delercate as dew;
They come as reg'lar as the schooner's clock,
The little fellers, all deep blue, as if
A'mighty God splashed it out o' the pot

He paints the sky. . . . Damnation! When a whiff
O' bilge comes up the fo'c'sle stinkin' hot,
I thinks o' flowers like a soul in hell!"

Below Bill's house a wharf and fish-house stand,
And underneath the gable scrawled: "The Belle
Mahone"—after the song, I think. A band
Of red borders a brown wide-running door
That opens on the wharf—a wilderness
Of extra spars, rope, riggings, codlines for
The cranky green-hulled schooner Lottie S.

A fish-house at its best's a fearsome thing—
All smells and slop of ancient oily brine
With bulk of barrels for the seasoning
Of green cod. 'Tis no cellar rich with wine
That mellows for the goblet. 'Tis a place
For nastiness of evil ways and words,
When men are drunk and on them the disgrace
Of our ancestral beasthood falls like birds
Of carrion, squawking as their razor beaks
Tear at dead eyes; for eyes are dead that fail
To look on beauty with that awe which seeks
Truth in earth's loveliness that must prevail.
This have I learned since first I saw the sun:
Man's soul needs all the avenues of sense
For its high purpose; ugly odors run
Cross current to the soul's experience,
With ugly sights and sounds, rank memories
Of olden griefs from which the body rose

Uplifted by the soul. How hard to please
The God within the flesh, the God who knows
That dissonance is evil, be it sight
Or sound or smell, evil and therefore fraught
With anguish to the soul whose one delight
Is harmony. In hell the damned are caught,
Not by that beauty which the priests have banned,
But by that ugliness which walks abroad
Through earth's far loveliness, holding command
On every one who has insulted God
Who made things good.

The fish-house, Belle Mahone,
Was long and wide and high. Its westward gable
Had one round window like an eye that shone
Out on The Cove. A low deal gutting table
Stood left beside the door and near the post
That held the Lottie's bow when she warped in,
Discharging cargo at the wharf. Bill's boast,
"Hell meets wit' welcome when I feels for sin,"
Was symbolized by the fish-house Belle Mahone;
For in the great loft low above the barrels
Bill entertained his friends. Was it not known
That gambling bouts with rum and bloody quarrels
Marked many nights of Bill's return from sea?
Worse things are also said of what took place
Sometimes within the loft, things that must be
Passed by with veiled or with averted face.
And so the ugly odors and the sight
Between the barrels seemed a sacrament

Of sin, a sign to signify the blight
Upon Bill Boram.

Parson Blaylock spent

His fervid eloquence in vain to move
This house of Beelial, praying it be hurled
To hottest hell, because it made The Cove
A hissing and a byword through the world;
But spite of all his preaching and his praying,
Bill went his evil ways, and only turned
Aside from them when it was time for spraying
Tea roses and the lovely like that yearned
For fellowship even from this man of sin.

.
“The only time I ever says a prayer,”
Bill used to say, “is when the buds begin,
An’ honey-smells o’ blossom loads the air
Wit’ cargoes like them bloody ships that sail
From furrin ports o’ Barbary an’ Spain.
’Sa truth I tells you, fellers, I gets pale
At smells an’ sights o’ flowers from a pain
That starts inside me. . . . But—oh, hell! I say,
Come on, you stinkin’ sculpins, have a drink.”

Of course the gossips had their harpy way
On Bill’s behavior, missing not a wink
Directed at that derelict of morals—
Kate Coolin—who could name as many lovers
As there were beads upon her string of corals.
Kate was a kitchen pot with many covers.

She had a beauty of that faded kind
Which made one think of dahlias overblown;
And just because she laughed and did not mind
What women said, but gave to men her own
Wild drink of lust, Bill Boram and the others
Bowed down to her and waited on her word,
Pledged her in rum and called themselves blood-
brothers,

While she looked on through green cat-eyes and purred.
Kate lived across The Cove, and owned her house
Within a garden that was walled with stone.
Kate often said, "A cat will hunt a mouse,
Why not a woman man? Else live alone.
Hell does I care fo' them old tabbies' talk!"

Then Bill would pour for her a dirty glass,
Laughing, "Their blood is milk, their bones is chalk;
You has more sense than any o' them, lass.
Life is a drink o' Forty-Over-Proof
For them as likes to take it at a gulp.
Old Blaylock needn't think that he c'n spoof
Us fellers who c'n beat Old Nick to pulp."

Kate's window opened on a bank of flowers
That grew in tangled glory near the wall;
Old-fashioned blossoms timing to the hours
And seasons of the year from spring to fall.
Her bleeding-hearts, nasturtiums, marigold,
Her hollyhocks, Sweet William and the rest,
Made Bill's heart ache for envy; and Kate's bold

Green eyes, red mouth, full throat and buxom breast
Were sometimes more than rivaled by the blooms
Within her garden.

“Bill, ya damned red fool!”

Piqued, Kate would say, “Again ya has tha glooms
From garden gazin’ an’ that kind o’ drool.
Shet down tha windy an’ come back ta cards.
Some day ya’ll turn ta seed an’ be a melon—
Tha mushy yalla kind in dunghill yards—
That’s what ya’ll grow ta be, mind what I’m tell’n.”

For answer Bill would bow a humble head,
His shoulders quaking and his red brows bent:
“My God! They makes me wish that I wuz dead—
Them flowers, Kate . . . they is so innercent . . .
An’ we—what is we, Kate? When I guts fish
Or salts ’em down, I feels to home in hell,
An’ drink an’ whorin’ is me only wish;
But when I comes upon the sight an’ smell
O’ bleedin’ hearts or pansies, seems to me
As I’ve broke promise wit’ some mate I know—
The whitest, cleanest kind o’ company
That I kept once—can’t tell how long ago.
I sees his face an’ knows it—yes I does—
Blue eyes like harebells—all the rest’s in fog;
But them eyes tell me o’ the man I wuz
Afore I . . . hell! give me a glass o’ grog.”

“Bill’s tangled in tha riggin’, fellas,” Kate
Would toss her head and say, and look at him,

Half fearful that the drink had turned his pate,
"Come, take a drink afore we douse tha glim."

Among The Cov'ers it was common talk
That drink and hellery had done for Bill.
They never trembled on a garden walk
At moonlit flowers when the night is still.
Earth-bound and blind, they never turned to see
What magic tapers burn above the grass
Among wild roses near the tracery
Of gray snake fences. Gleams within a glass,
Their world was. They were ordinary folk—
Regarding Bill's black passions devil-born,
His moody love of flowers just a joke;
As Bill in turn regarded them with scorn.

Once on a time a voice called from a cross,
"Forgive them, for they know not what they do!"
That voice still calls where stupid people toss
Dice for man's seamless robe—not torn in two,
But raffled where he bleeds beneath the thorns—
The thorns that always pierce the brow of thought,
Crushed there by hands as ridged and hard as horns;
Hands of the people by the High Priest bought.

Bill's tragedy was this: No man could see
The Christ Who came to him upon a field
Where wild flowers are, in gardens where the tree
Stands sentinel above the phlox and Who appealed
To save Bill's soul through Bill's sweet love of flowers;
And just because they could not see, they crowned

Bill's head with mockery of thorns. The powers
Of darkness fain would follow with the hound—
His kennel is Convention, and his name
Public Opinion. When you hear their yell,
A soul is born and passes through the flame
Upward to God. Beware the stupid Good,
Who, being stupid, cannot therefore tell
Christ from the thief blaspheming on his rood.

Among Bill's cronies was a weakly one—
All trembling adoration of Bill's strength
And lust for sin—Elihu Conrad's son.
He was a man of an uncertain length,
Because his backbone could not keep his head
Upon a perpendicular. His hair—
Like floss from late October thistles shed—
Fell down to hide a slanting forehead where
A thin ridged crooked nose began to rise.
Sparse growths of floss were on his mouth and chin,
So weak, so empty and so gander-wise,
That one expected him to hiss. A thin
Throat met two forward-sloping shoulder blades
That bowed in meek acceptance of that yoke
Which all the unloved carry. "Ace of spades"
We called his awkward feet, and used to poke
Fun at his limp. Yet in this man's discord
One note was true: A sudden miracle
Of light and color, as from clear skies poured,
Would happen, like a kiss of love in hell,
When George in answer opened wide his eyes—

Blue as the harebells in a place of vines,
Blue as the moons on wings of butterflies;
Their color sent a prickling up the spines
Of men who left off cursing him to stare.

Bill loved him as a man might love a dog—
A thing for kicks, caresses, and a share
Of fragments from the table when the grog
Mellowed his mood; but whether Bill was kind
Or cross, George served his master with a love
That seemed a very foolish and a blind
Passion to all the people at The Cove.

At sea George Conrad was Bill Boram's cook,
And he could cook as all the crew averred:
"G'arge Coonrad's figger-head ain't wo'th a look,
But G'arge's like fer cookin' ain't been heard,
Ner seen uv anywheres along ther Banks!"

Yet these same boasters of George Conrad's art
Played on their fo'c'sle cook rough oafish pranks,
Until his haunting harebell eyes would start
With overflowing tears; then he would clack,
"Gud-gud-guddamit, b'ys, leaf me erlone!"

His bunk behind the foremast had a sack—
Straw-stuffed—for bedding, hard as any stone,
With one rough dirty blanket for a cover.
Here midst the many noises and the smell
Of bilge and pickle brine, this loveless lover
Slept while the Lottie's bowsprit rose and fell.

George seemed to us a half-wit harmless freak,
The bearer of the bladder and the bells;
And when on Sunday nights we heard his meek
Voice quaver through the creaking and the smells
Down in the lantern-lighted fo'c'sle, we,
Playing at forty-fives, would turn to jeer:

"Nice thing ter have er parrot's company." . . .

"Vat iss dem tam stranch noises vat I hear?" . . .

"Who let ther old gray gander from ther grate?" . . .

"It's jest er porpoise blowin'." . . .

"No it ain't." . . .

"What is it then?" . . .

"A tomcat out too late."

Then George would cease to sing and make complaint,
"Gud-gud-guddamit, b'ys!" Within the murk
His eyes would seem to float and burn above,
Till we would feel afraid of further quirk
Or rough-mouthed laughter at this man of love
Who wanted nothing in the world to do—
So great his heart and simple all his soul—
But wait on bad Bill Boram and us crew.
He could not sing, he could not even pole
A clam scow; but he certainly could cook.
"Gud-gud-guddamit" was his only oath—

He hissed it when excited—and his look
On Bill was worship. Bill was never loath
To take advantage of this utter love;
He treated it as we treat shrubs and trees—
All Nature's inexhaustive treasure trove
Of deep sea shells, polyps, anemones;
Shadows on inland lakes, when herds of hills
Crowd close together like wild buffaloes;
Ferns and their fellows marching down deep rills
Of woodland water, guarding till it flows
Forth into rivers. We are casual
With Nature and but seldom moved to feel
Our debt to her. We must have ritual
And olden rites of prayer, who make appeal
To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Forgetful that these high and holy Ones
Come down to men at evening Pentecost
Of skies that burn with westward setting suns.

When Bill was on a more than daily drunk
And helpless to ascend the long low hill,
Veering to leeward like a Chinese junk,
George came and towed him home, not minding Bill
Who roared on after, as a port-bound trawler
Comes roaring past the bar behind a tug,
Trailing a plume of steam, her black bow taller
Than that tug's funnel. George was used to lug
Bill's burdens made by many nasty sins.
He did not mind, he did not once complain,
When Bill in anger kicked him on the shins

Or smashed him on the mouth. He bore his pain
Without a word and went on serving Bill.
For this we held George Conrad in deep scorn,
Adding our brutal horse-play with a will,
And made him curse the day that he was born.

At sea Bill held himself apart from booze,
Because an aching head and rum-blurred eyes
Make bad Bank-Captains. There's too much to lose
By drinking, and Bill aimed to keep the prize
Won by the Lottie S. from year to year
For reaching port ahead of all her sisters.
So Bill would say, "They's time for rum an' beer
An' beatin' hell damnation into blisters,
When we discharges cargo at The Belle.
My creed is this: Play when they's time to play,
An' when they's time to work, then work like hell—
That's what I alwuz said an' what I say."

So for that reason, there were golden hours
For Conrad and his meek soul's great desire—
Bill Boram—since they shared a love of flowers;
And on that love unwitting they climbed higher
God's hidden spiral stairway to the stars!

Oft when the dories left these two alone,
And George was humming hymns between the spars,
Peeling potatoes for the big beef-bone
Stew that we liked so well, or scouring pans,
Bill would come reeling down the quarter-deck
With what he used to call his Bible, Hans

Gluck's Botany, calf-bound, without a speck,
Brass-cornered, margins of hand-tooled design—
Minute gilt vines—and center one red rose.
Then George would stop his dreary droning whine,
Cough, spit, or loudly blow his crooked nose,
And rise to meet his master, as a dog
In ecstasy of what he dumbly loves—
His eyes like blue rifts in a bank of fog,
As innocent as are the eyes of doves.

My mate and I would find them thus together—
Our dory sliding down the hills of sea
To leeward of the Lottie—when the weather
Made fishing good and we sailed back to be
First on the home-trip, loaded to the gunwales;
And as we coasted, words like these would come:

"Them tubers must be planted deep. They tunnels
Up'ards to meet the light, sartin that some
Place waits for 'em—all blue sky an' green grass—
Wit' smells an' sights o' petals everywhere.
I tells you, G'arge, these facts is like a glass
In which you sees yourself. I doesn't care
A damn for chu'ch. The pa'sons is all wrong
'Bout hell an' heaven an' God an' Jesus Christ;
But surely somethin' seems to ache an' long
Deep down in me for blue sky-spaces. Twic't
Has I bored up'ards nearly through the ground
An' almost heard an' seen an' smelt the day
Jist on the other side o' dark an' sound;

Somethin' o' beauty mor'n the month o' May
When through the moss an' roots o' trees them stars
O' airy blossoms twinkles pink an' white.
I disagrees wit' pa'sons, an' these spars
A-tap'rin' up'ard tells to me a sight
More'n most o' men c'n tell. To hell wit' creeds!
Yet, begod, them dam tubers gets my goat.
I'm strong for fightin', an' I likes the deeds
O' deviltry; they is no man afloat
C'n lick Bill Boram, an' I'm surely bad;
But somethin' like a tuber's inside me,
That tunnels up'ard, somethin' that is glad
In darkness wors'n hell. What c'n it be?"

"Yer soul!"

"Oh, hell! they ain't no soul."

"Ther iz."

"You goddam gander, when we's dead we's dead!"

"Ther hell yer sez zo? Then what wuz it riz
Right up within yer when them May flowers spread
Over the moss an' through ther roots o' trees?"

Then Bill would spy us, close the book and go
Mumblin' a Litany of blasphemies,
Climb quarter-deck and disappear below.

We thought these things a weakness in our Bill,
Nodded and looked at night across the cards,

While one would say, "Th' ol' man has lost his skill
O' cu'sin', an' he'd better brace his yards
Afore he takes ter prayin'—damn his soul!"

And then another, "All Bill wants is grog."

Another, "This damn fo'c'sle is a hole
In hell—all smoke an' smell wors'n any fog!"

And for'ard of the table George looked on,
His great eyes floating on a sea of smoke,
As I have seen two mountain peaks at dawn
Swim in a sea of mist before it broke.

"That gander's got him crazy," one would say
And squirt tobacco juice at patient George.
"What does we want wit' his likes anyway? . . .
Crawl in yer bunk, damn yer, yer gets me gorge!"

We did not like those moments of our Bill
When he was mooning after foolish flowers;
We wanted him to do as we did—kill
Time with a bottle, souse his idle hours
In brown and bitter Demarara rum
We always got in kegs from Foxey Doolin.
We did not like to see our Bill so glum,
And said, "It's time fer port an' grog an' foolin'
At Sister Kate's er at ther Belle Mahone."
We whooped like mad when Bill's word came at last,
That put within the Lottie's mouth a bone—
Her gunwale under and the main hatch fast.

There only was one man whom Bill respected,
Old Bobby Fox who lived above The Cove;
His running gear looked always much neglected,
And yet he had the austere face of Jove.
His forehead mounted upward to his hair—
The way a cliff keeps climbing to a cloud;
His eyes would twinkle kindly or would stare;
His voice was seldom high and never loud.
He was a master builder. No man knew
The ins and outs of mill-dams more than he.
He could conduct a log raft and a crew
Of drunken drivers down the stream to sea,
And never lose a log or man. A bottle
Was nothing more to him than 'twas to Bill:
One gulp, and all of it went down his throttle,
Then he was ready for another fill.

I who am Parson Blaylock's vagrant son—
Mate of the Flying Scud that sails afar,
Cruising for whales, from Port o' Caledon,
Within the circle of the Polar star—
Hold Bobby Fox the finest man I know.
I got enough book-baiting from my sire—
A scholar of those solid sorts that grow
In English Alma Maters—to aspire
Beyond Bill Boram and his cook and crew;
So read and talked at times with Bobby Fox,
When they were drinking "Donald's Honey Dew"
Down at The Belle or where Kate's rows of phlox
Bordered the bank abloom with bleeding hearts.

While it is true I vexed the Parson's soul,
Determined not to take a course in arts
At Windsor College, having for my goal
A Deep-Sea Captain's papers; yet I owe
All that I have of love for English Letters
To Bobby Fox, who taught me how to know
The poets from those fools who ape their betters
With crooked lengths of raucous empty words.
He made me understand how mighty God
Transfigured scales and fins to feathered birds,
And shaped the throat of Helen from the clod.
Self-lifted from the welter of his world,
He made his mind a mirror of the ages.

Still do I see him, with his white beard curled
By clutching fingers, pondering the pages
Of some old book. I liked him best of all
His moments with me, when he read from Keats,
Expounding as he read. His voice would fall
In measured music to those great-winged beats
That lift "The Nightingale" beyond the sun
Of Shakespeare or the flame of Shelley's star,
Until the deep dream of Endymion
Became in me one moment's avatar
Of beauty: then I drank the purple cup
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
Flooding my soul with wine, and lifted up
By wings of fancy, fled away with him
To magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.

Vagrant and wastrel, without kith or home,
I know that then my spirit's self was born.

The reason why Bob loved to drink with Bill
Was that he saw the mystical red rose
In Bill's sweet love of flowers, and found the still
Deep water which the Shepherd Spirit knows.
Though many people called Bob Fox a fool,
Laughed at his long white hair and tangled beard,
He was to Bill an angel of the pool—
Stagnant, scum-covered, pregnant with a weird
Wild family of things that skipped and twittered,
Till it was troubled by the breath of wings.

Old Bobby's house among the trees was littered
With books and papers. "I like to have the things
About me in a tumble. Books are selves;
They should be made to feel like folks at home—
And not like strangers, stacked there on those shelves,"
He used to say. "Now look at Gibbon's 'Rome'
All torn and tattered lying on the floor
With Tacitus and Homer. Can't you hear
Them gossiping? They are old friends. Before
You, Bill, were born, or ever thought of beer,
They were old cronies toddling down the road
Together. See how Keats and Burns debate
Odd matters of their craft. They need no goad
To prick their wit. There Lamb and Shelley wait
For Wordsworth—always slow and pondering.
Coleridge has come, half-crazed from taking dope,

But Godlike in his madness, wondering
At what he hears, wistful, too weak to cope
With life, yet loving it, and humble—glad
To be among his fellows. That great hunch
Of cheekbones and red hair is Byron. Mad
He was, all right, and all hell flame—could crunch
A cockney's chest-bone with his fist. He swam
The Hellespont—could beat you, Bill, at swearing.
He stood alone and did not give a damn
For life, divine and beautiful in daring.”
Bob was a rebel. His gray eyes had seen
Too many lies go garbed in honest worth
For him to acquiesce. “It gets my spleen
The way those actors walk about the earth
As if they owned it.” . . .

People of The Cove,

The parson and the local pedagogue,
Held this man with the austere face of Jove
Demented or hell-bound. He had a dog
Named “Tob”—an English bull—the tawny kind—
All growl and teeth and wrinkles. When Bob closed
His gate and took the road, Tob went behind,
Snuffling and coughing. When Bob sat, he dozed
Between his feet. When Bob got up to go,
Tob came to life and wagged his stumpy tail,
Barking. Bob thought him wise and liked to show
What Tob could do—Bill laughing like a gusty gale.

Bob liked to call himself agnostic, said,
“Nobody knows how man came here at all. . . .

Don't quote the Bible! 'tis a guess-book—read
Only by those who hold to Adam's fall—
A book of fables and of prophet-stuff.
Prophets are just good guessers. As for priests"—
Here Bob Fox always swore—"I hate their guff
About the Sabbath and their fasts and feasts.
I cannot see that they have changed so much
Since Annas and his son-in-law hung Christ
On Golgotha. . . . *There was* a man! No touch
Of snobbishness on him. He had the gist
Of common sense. If he survives the cross
And lives somewhere among those distant stars—
I don't deny, Bill, it's a pitch and toss
That he's alive somewhere without the scars
His poor dead face had when they took him down—
If he's alive somewhere and hears the drool
Blaylock declaims about a harp and crown
And raiment whitened in a bloody pool,
It must make him ashamed and want to hide
His head behind a planet and forget
That he was sold for cash and crucified! . . .
Come, Tob. . . . Night, Bill! . . . Wind's east. . . .
Guess 't'll be wet."

Of course, as I have said, The Cov'ers thought
Bob Fox worse than a fool. At sermon time,
They nodded heads when Parson Blaylock brought
His admonition hard against the crime
Of creedless living. He would say, "Who knows
What God's thoughts are? Beloved, we are worms,

Vile earth and sinners. God himself bestows
Grace and redemption; we must take his terms
Or go to hell; he who denies the cross,
Denies that unforgiving wrath of God
Which Christ assuaged for man. Eternal loss
Be his who leans not on the staff and rod
Of our religion. . . . Let us, brethren, sing—
Hymn 9: "There is a fountain filled with blood." "
And as they sang, my thoughts went wandering
With Bobby Fox and Bill through Wylie's Wood.

I know that I have been a worthless son—
Unworthy of the man whose name I bear—
And I deplore the deeds that I have done
In quest of idle pleasure—black despair
Is on me as I write—yet this I know:
That father would have been a greater man,
And I a better son, if, long ago,
He had renounced the God of Caliban
Which he mistook for Jesu's God of Love.
Had he preached Him Whom Jesus used to preach,
What wonders would have happened at The Cove;
What miracles and marvels on the beach!

The Parson was a man of gloom. His eyes
Held ice within their blend of gray and green,
Small and close-set. Like Byron's Bridge of Sighs,
His dominating nose was doom. Between
The thin-pressed lips no laugh could ever live—
It died ere it was born. Those lips were like

The lips of Borgia who could not forgive
A rival's word. His tongue, a sting to strike
And poison as it struck, made me afraid—
Who would have loved him. He was straight and true,
Lived close to his convictions. A keen blade
Within a scabbard, his soul liked to hew
The heads of the ungodly from their shoulders.
Had he known God of Whom he talked so much,
Our hearts had not been hard as granite boulders;
We might have felt instead the tender touch
Of Him Who loved the lilies of the field
And played with wrens and sparrows, as He played
With children in the market, and appealed
To sinners, saying, "Do not be afraid!"

This cold-eyed son of thunder and of gloom,
Drove Bobby, Bill, myself and many others
To outer darkness and eternal doom;
Called us the sons of Beelial. Like brothers,
We gaily moved against the gate of hell,
Storming its locks with laughter. "Rum" our word,
We passed it on to Satan and who dwell
Forever with him. Bill was never heard
With God's name on his tongue save when he swore—
And Robert Fox on sunny summer mornings,
Walked past the church and its wide open door,
What time the pulpit creaked with parson's warnings!

The gossip of the gossips of The Cove
Was named "She Weasel" by her bitten sisters.

Her topboots and her bonnet seemed to rove
From dawn to dark. No lips of love had kissed hers,
But surely hate and malice had. She washed
Clothes for a living, when she did not hoe
In gardens. By her conscience unabashed,
She thrived on scandal, seeming glad to know
Evil of any one. She was the head
Of our auxiliary. She had saved money,
So loaned it out at ten per cent. She said,
“De Bible puts it dat way. . . . Ain’t it funny
How God wo’ks wit’ de godly! I gets rich
By ’beyin’ Numbers 18:21.

Bill was her bugbear, called her “That old witch!”;
Teased her at times and, talking to her, spun
Yarns by the fathom of the fisher folk,
And sent her flying through The Cove to tell—
What never happened! This we thought a joke
And laughed together, drinking at The Belle.

The Weasel’s brother had the writer’s itch
And filled the county paper full of rhyme.
He used to say, “Bill Shakespeare hadn’t sich
A knack o’ werse—c’n beat him any time;
He mostly wrote a werse dat dey calls ‘blank,’
Vich means he couldn’t always keep de jig,
Like Johnny c’n. . . . Say, b’ys, to hear John spank
De fiddle is a sight—squeals like a pig,
An’ bellers like a cow, dat fiddle does. . . .
You has to keep de jig, or else you ain’t

A poet as I is. Vunce ven I vuz
Out valking on de beach, I felt all faint
Vit' music that come soundin' on de sea,
An' den, I svears vit' all my heart, I jest
Could hear de angels laughin' plain's could be,
As if dey vere a ridin' on de crest
O' vaves that slithered sodden on de sand! . . .
That's vy I is a poet, 'cause I knows
Vat most o' fellers cannot onderstand:
De reason vy de red is on de rose;
Vy birdsongs in de bushes makes you mad
Vit' longin' for to leap onto de air—
Does any of you fellers feel dat glad
For beauty dat you vants to pull your hair?"

We laughed at him, as we made fun of George,
And idled while he worked and talked along—
All smudge and sweat within his roadside forge;
His beaten anvil clinking into song.
No beauty that I know of touched his face—
His eyes were crossed, his chin a crooked pear—
But something in his words, distilled by grace
From deep-throat music, made us all aware
Of one who wore the colored coat of dreams.
His friend was little blind old Johnny Deal
Who played the fiddle. Quaint familiar themes
Of music were his choice—Virginia Reel;
St. Patrick's Day; the Brides of Enderby. . . .
How he could play them! Sitting on a keg
Of horseshoe nails, he made such melody

That we were bound to shake a joyous leg,
Dancing about the forge, while, with his hammer,
The poet-blacksmith kept a clinking time;
Until we filled the cob-webbed roof with clamor
Of thudding footfalls through the lusty rhyme:

“The leg of a duck,
The wing of a goose—
Ta-ra—ta-ra—too-looral-riday.”

Sam Publicover was our poet's name,
And he lived with his sister on the hill,
Not far from Foxey Doolin. When a game
Of forty-fives was on, and Skipper Bill,
Mellowed by liquor and his luck at cards,
Said, “Send for Sam an’ Johnny,” George the cook
Would answer, “Fill me a glass an’ brace me yards,
An’ I will go an’ git ’em, hook er crook!”
And when Sam came with John and Johnny’s fiddle,
Things happened in the great loft of The Belle.
Kate Coolin and her reckless kind—the riddle
Of all the ages how they slip to hell—
Were always there and ready for that fun
Which drink and elemental sex produce;
Ready as any man with fist or gun—
To kiss or fight was all the same, for use
Had hardened them. Sam called the dances off,
While Johnny played, seated upon a table
And thumping with his feet. No pig-sty trough
Was filthier than the floor. The low wide gable
Held all the smoke; but we had lungs like leather.

Chairs, tables, back against the sloping wall,
We chose our partners, kissed them and together
Danced till the webs of dawn began to fall.
Blind Johnny played his tunes in two-stringed chord,
Holding his fiddle well down on his breast,
His head thrown back, and chugging, like a Ford,
With both feet, keeping noisy time as best
He could above the racket that we made;
While Sam, beside him on the floor, declaimed:

“Come vit’ yer richetty table . . . promenade. . . .
Saloot yer pardeners. . . . Kiss de gal yer tamed. . . .
Sashay . . . keep step dere, G’arge an’ Mary Ann. . . .
De figger eight. . . . Now do de Sugar Bowl. . . .
A leedle faster, Johnny, if yer can. . . .
Now all toget’er on de Dutchman’s Roll,
Den kiss an’ lead yer lady down de line.”
As Sammy called and Johnny scraped away,
The fish-loft, reeking smoke and smell of brine,
Rocked to the rafters till the break of day.

PART TWO

“And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.”

—*John Henry Newman.*

PART TWO

This is the picture, blent of light and shade,
Of bad Bill Boram. Have I dwelt too long,
And with too much detail on things that made
Him memorable to us? Forgive the wrong,
And in your kindness think a while on me,
Writing 'twixt watch and watch beneath the star
That burns above this frozen polar sea,
My table built about the old Scud's spar.
A man's soul is a bit of cosmic vapor.
It may become a planet or a sun,
Or it may be a twinkle on a taper
Set in a window for some absent one
Who tarries overlong within the night;
But I affirm to all of you who read
This story, if it ever come to light,
That man is God's Son, that his final need
Is always God. I hold that we are here
On secret service, and in flesh disguised
That each may do his work and interfere
With no one. I maintain that God devised
All sorts and kinds of methods when he said,
"Let us make man," because God's mighty mind

Is full of dreams, as this sky overhead
Is full of stars. If any man can find
The number of those stars, then let him tell
What are the plans and purposes of God.

Give me a chart of all the seas that swell
From shore to shore, and I will sight Cape Cod
Or round The Horn, with sextant, compass, log
To make my reckonings. Here is a chart—
This story that I write—a glass o' grog
Beside me on the table. Do I part
With reason who affirm enough is here
To pick my way and find what God is after?
If so, then close this page upon your sneer
And go your way, my friend, you and your laughter—
The world has lots of blind men—you are blind!
Thank God, I think your blindness a disguise.
Or I might want to weep for all your kind
Who only have the outward form of eyes.

A little space of coastline is enough
For any sailor, if he have the art
Of making havens on the high seas—rough
Or smooth the weather—working by the chart
Through drowsy distances of wakeful nights;
And that is all I ask of you to own,
Who follow me. Behold, the harbor lights
Are winking down the windswept horizon!

A vulgar, dirty, drunken beast was Bill;
George Conrad just a dreary hopeless fool;

Kate Coolin was indeed a jaded Jill;
The rest of us, mere tadpoles in a pool
Of green-webbed water, all save Bobby Fox
And Parson Blaylock my dogmatic father;
But, by the charted course that skirts the rocks
Of Scander Shoals and its wind-drifted lather,
I bid you ponder as I pick a path
Through what is written of my bad Bill Boram,
That we may find Christ in this man of wrath,
And finding, sing, "O come, let us adore him!"

The thing that I first started out to tell,
Began to happen in the Lottie S.
When Bill was well upon the road to hell,
And we were prone to curse but not to bless.
All season luck had gone against the crew.
Our dories rode the sliding hills of sea,
And lurked within their hollows where the blue
Sky seemed to roof us over. Bitingly
Bill cursed us, as we cursed in turn at him,
Because the cod were scarce; and day by day,
We came back almost empty, save a skim
Of haddock and the like. We worked away
From cold, wet, dismal dawns to gusty dark
And made the Lottie by her dipping light,
Cursing in chorus, like a wolf-pack bark
Within the silence of a Northern night.
We picked out Bill upon the quarter-deck
Merely by all the waiting mass of him—
Fixed like a spar and reeling in a wreck

Of rigging—save an intermittent, dim
Glow of his pipe. Bill's silence was far worse
Than blasphemy. Knowing the man, we felt
His soul was one red scorifying curse
Like a lake of lava. He stood hands in belt,
Marking our empty dories as we hauled
Them in and made them fast—boat piled on boat,
As George the cook piled plates. If some one bawled
An extra curse, Bill did not seem to note
His noise. If one spoke to him, Bill's reply
Was just a jet of smoke above his beard,
And then a deeper fury in his eye,
Glowing like polished bronze. Somehow we feared
Bill's quiet more than his blaspheming lips;
Turned heavily to eat whatever grub
George served, then smoked and talked of sea and ships
And wondered who had deviled our old tub—
The cranky green-hulled schooner Lottie S.

"I does not like the look in th' ol' man's eyes,"
One of our dory-men would say. "I guess
He blames it on us fellers. Won't surprise
Me any if they's hell to pay 'fore long,
Unless we strikes some cod."

"Ya damn well right,"

His mate would answer, pulling deep and strong
At his clay pipe. "Bill's spilin' for a fight,
An' one o' these black God-forgotten days
He'll let tha devil tap 'im on tha shoulder,
An' then ya'll see what happens."

"Sure, he'll raise

Hell a'right, afore us fellas is much older."

So none of us was taken much aback
When finally the devil entered Bill,
And he came down the fo'c'sle like a wrack
Of North-east squalls. Conrad had stopped to fill
The kettle on the stove which stood port side
The fo'c'sle steps. I saw Bill Boram kick
Conrad and crack a rib.

"God damn your hide,"

Yelled Bill, "get out o' this!"

I tried to pick
George from the floor, for he fell with a groan,
And met Bill's fist on my protesting lips
That said, "Bill Boram, you've a heart o' stone!"

"I has a heart o' hell for them as ships
For seamen an' is lubbers," Bill returned,
While I ran from his reach. The rest stood still.
George groaned again. The fo'c'sle lanterns burned
Yellow above his face so weak of will,
And void of purpose.

"He has killed the cook!"

One muttered, adding, "They must swing who kill."

Then Bill stepped over George, closed fist, and shook
Defiance in our faces. "You damned scum
O' rottin' mud-pools, does you think I care

For laws o' God or man? You've swilled my rum
An' eat my vittles, but you does not dare
To stand against Bill Boram in his hour.
The wrath o' hell is on me, for you've shirked
All season. None o' you is fit to scour
Pans wit' the cook—a damn fool, but he's worked
His fingers to the bone for me!"

"And you,"

I yelled with crimson froth through broken teeth,
"Kick him to death."

Bill glared at me. I drew
Back—eyes on Bill—then stood, touched my knife
sheath,
And waited. One by one the others crept
Past me for safety in the shadows where
The fo'c'sle ends, and where George Conrad slept.
I faced Bill. Underneath the yellow flare
And smoke of swaying lanterns, Bill went back,
I with him, swiftly on the clustered years
Of yesterdays, as wild things take the track
Lost in the leaves of autumn. Ancient fears,
Old hates, stirred in us. From our glaring eyes
Ghosts of dead quarrels looked, as through the panes
Of haunted houses (are those tales all lies?)
Pale memories appear in autumn rains
Like tears of grief; they looked from me to Bill,
Met in the valley of the scattered bones.

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And then I knew that we were Gods to kill
Or make alive. I heard vast undertones
Of choral words caught from the morning stars,
When all the sons of God shouted for joy.
Eternity was on us and the bars
Of space were lifted. Hate sought to destroy
That moment, but the morning song of Love,
As earth's foundations rose, did conquer Hate
And made him friend; so they no longer strove
Together. I knew God was there, elate
With courage that is born of faith in things.
I said, deep in my soul where God is guest:
"It is no marvel that all beauty springs
From earth triumphant, that the leaves attest
With trees and grass, forever faith in Him—
O God, thy faith in us in turn demands
Our faith in thee!" At this, I saw a dim
White face of pain and movement of hurt hands!

As I stood waiting there for Bill to leap,
George stirred and groaned again. He tried to rise,
But fell back on the floor. He tried to creep
Closer to Bill, with hurt love in his eyes—
Eyes that were wet blue harebells when the mist
Rolls back from summer gardens—and to me,
They were as the rebuking gaze of Christ
Turned on the swearing Simon. Mystery
Of some pursuing and un baffled love
Looked out from Conrad's eyes. I thought of all
That Robert Fox—the wise man of The Cove—

Had taught me, and I heard once more the call
Of morning muezzins out of the East,
Through noises of old cities. Like strung beads
Fumbled by fingers of a praying priest,
I touched linked memories of olden deeds
By which man rose bleeding from the abyss
Whence all the worlds rise. Like a written page,
The past was. I knew I had lived for this
One moment of clear vision, and my rage
Against Bill Boram died down in the tears
Of Peter when he wept within the night.
Did that in me which went back through the years
Touch bad Bill Boram in the cruel night
Of his red wrath? He turned from me and saw
What he had done, and then the red hot glare
Died in his gaze, as he, with waking awe,
Descended, as a man descends a stair,
The blue depths of George Conrad's misted eyes.
Did Bill find what I found? I only know
That on his angry face began to rise,
Like moon-rays on the sullen fall and flow
Of black sea waters, such a radiance
That I saw him transfigured. All the man
Was white and glistening. Was it just chance
The fo'c'sle shadows lengthened to a span
Of terraced avenues of olive trees?
Strange that I heard a far-away sad crying,
As of a soul deep in the mysteries
Of grief—a soul within the shadow lying!

I saw so much that moment in a mist
As one sees ere one sleeps. Bill's face went white.
He stood above George Conrad, each great fist
Pale on the knuckles. In the yellow light
Of swaying lanterns, something seemed to stand
Beside him; something that had haunting eyes
Like Conrad's; something with a wounded hand,
A smitten mouth; something that pain made wise.
Bill could not see, but well I know he felt
That bleeding passion. . . . Suddenly he bowed
His body, then in presence of us all he knelt
At Conrad's side. He shuddered, as a shroud
Plucked by the wind shudders; and then he spoke:

"God damn the feet that steps upon a flower,
The fingers that has ever blossoms broke!
God damn to torment o' hell's hottest hour,
Me for a traitor! . . . Men, I has betrayed
Beauty! . . . Look at his eyes!"

And one by one,
Bill's crew came down the fo'c'sle. Each man made
An act of reverence—the orison
Of souls that see God's beauty in a blade,
A bud, a leaf; and seeing, are aware
Of His pervading Presence in all things
That grow above the soil or tread the stair
Of morning in a majesty of wings.
No word was spoken, as the men passed by;
For Bill's repentance poured upon their souls,

As one may see, at dark, white water fly
Over the saw-toothed reefs of Scander Shoals.
Foul with the smoke of lanterns and the smell
Of bilge and pickle brine, the fo'c'sle seemed
A hollow on a hill. I could not tell
Why all the birds sang. Like a story dreamed
Within a moment, when deceiving time
Plays tricks with fancy, all I ever saw
Of beauty lived again, as in a rhyme
Love can create its past. A cleansing awe
Was on us, as we watched Bill weeping there
Before George Conrad who looked up and smiled.
The Lottie's fo'c'sle was a place of prayer,
Each of her crew had gone back to the child
That found Christ's Kingdom. Sorrow baptized
them—

Sorrow that is the prophet of the ford
Bethabara, to whom Jerusalem
And all Judea come to find their Lord,
Revealed by Sorrow standing in the river
And wet with water as of falling tears—
Sorrow on whom the Holy Ghost and Giver
Of life waits for His moment, when He hears
That prophet cry, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Out of the brute there broke the sudden flame,
As red wheat-poppies burst between the clod,
Transfiguring the Lottie's crew with shame
For all that they had done to George. They stood
Silent before the blue appeal of eyes

That judged them, as of old Love on a rood
Judged men; for every word that crucifies,
And every thought that weaves a crown of thorn
Must come to judgment—else the soul in vain
Strives upward out of night to meet the morn
Upon the path of knowledge that is pain.
I saw the faces of the Lottie's crew
Change to those faces forming through the mist
Of Angelo's great picture on the blue
Above Rome's ever-offered Eucharist.

“G’arge, has I hurt you to your death?” Bill said.
“G’arge, mate o’ mine, I did not know that you
Had v’yaged wit’ me from the Port o’ Dead
To Port o’ Livin’. Matey, is it true,
Or is I crazed wi’ grievin’ o’ the catch
We has not made? It wuz so long ago
That we went sailin’ past a garden patch
High on a hill—the place I does not know—
But, G’arge, I sees it, plainer than I see
Them dirty lanterns swingin’ overhead.
Where did we live, my mate, and what wuz we
Afore we v’yaged from the Port o’ Dead?”
And for his answer Conrad only smiled;
But in that smile I swear I heard a sound
Far overhead, a faint far sound and wild,
Like summer voices calling from the ground,
When one rests under trees and listens well.
It came upon me in a gust of words,
Like broken echoes of a distant bell,
And not unlike the twittering of birds:

When it is morning, on the sky
The stars like dewdrops scattered lie;
And then, the sun, a golden rose,
Within God's garden open blows.

God's grafting knife, the quarter-moon,
Falls from His hand, when it is noon;
At noon he lets the tendril twine
About the stake above the vine.

God's cattle crop the tender grass.
They are the clouds that slowly pass—
They slowly pass along the way
Between to-day and yesterday.

God has no helpers but His sons
Who are His loved and trusted ones;
Together they go down the row
Where root and branch and blossom
grow.

As they go down, God laughs and talks.
He loves those early morning walks,
He loves the handles of a plough,
He loves the bending of a bough;

But more than all He loves each son,
Wants him to do what He has done—
Wants all His sons to do and dare,
That He with them may all things share.

God tells His sons, "I have a plan,
That we together may make man,
And on his forehead and his face
Impress our likeness and our grace.

"Out of the furrow in the clod,
Let us make man, my sons," saith God:
And all the sons together cry,
"We will!" across the morning sky.

"We will make man out of the clod,
We'll make him great and good, like God;
And that he may not fail God's plan,
We will descend and be made man—

"We will descend and count no loss,
No pain, no sorrow, scourge nor cross;
We'll dare the depth of death and hell
That man may be God's miracle—

"God's miracle of love and laughter,
With all that is Christ coming after—
God's miracle of lifted wings
Above a sea of sorrowings.

"We'll bend the sunbeams like a bow,
And bind them on his brow of snow;
And on his soul of sundered flame,
We'll write the new unwritten name.

"This will we do until the stars
Have flickered out, and all the bars

That shut man from eternal day
Are lifted up and thrown away."

Bill said, "Tom Blaylock, you has dared the devil,
Dared him an' beat him wit' a fist o' flame.
You does not know what you has done. The level
Path's mine now an' forever. By the name
Of Him as made the sea, and by the blue
Eyes o' my mate an' all the hurt I done
To him an' others; by the wrong done you;
By all the dirty hellery an' fun
O' summer nights wi' women, cards, an' rum;
By Jesus Christ an' his apostles, I
Will set my course for coast o' Kingdom Come. . . .
God send me to the devil if I lie!"

Then Bill went up the fo'c'sle stair and took
George Conrad with him. No man spoke a word.
We looked at one another, as men look
On sudden death. And then I thought I heard
A sound of song. It may have been the light
Wind through the Lottie's rigging and her spars,
But I was sure it was the harps of night
Heard by the shepherds on a hill of stars!

.

For days George Conrad lay at point of dying,
Down in Bill's cabin. We went at our work,
Spite of past failure, with the Lottie lying
Nose to the wind and nodding in the murk
Of foggy weather. Somehow we had heart

For fishing as we never fished before.
Along the black-sea hollows, far apart,
Our empty dories swung with dripping oar
And creaking gunwales, till their fishers found
Cod for the cargo of the Lottie S.
Whether our luck changed or the cod their ground,
I do not know, but certainly success—
So tardy—came to us at last. We felt
That Bill had brought back fortune by his oath
And change of heart, that moment when he knelt
Beside George Conrad; so we blessed them both,
Nor thought, in all our badness, it was strange
How fast the cod came. We were well content,
Though missing George at grub-time, with our change
Of fortune, speculated much and spent
Time talking over Bill's behavior: "He'll
Get over it, a'right, b'ys," one would say
Above the gutting table, "an' will feel
Fer hell ag'in afore we sights ther Bay."
And then we'd laugh in answer and forget,
As men forget those moments of a dream
In which the soul sees all things clearly. Yet
I could not through the laughter lose the gleam
Transfiguring Bill Boram's stricken face,
And bled within, knowing that I betrayed
By laughter, God's infinitude of grace;
So turned aside in shame of self and prayed.
I turned aside and prayed between the spars,
And then my thoughts were multitudinous things
That flickered through the rigging to the stars;

As from a meadow, phosphorescent wings
Flicker and fade upon the clustered heights
So far above the tangle of wet reeds,
Grass and the creepers. Yes, my thoughts were flights
Of June fireflies that swarmed above my deeds,
Gave them a moment of their glory, then
Passed upward on their high mysterious path
That ends in knowledge. I could hear the men
Talking and swearing at the tables. Wrath
Was not in their rude manner, and each oath
Sounded a psalm of gradual degrees,
As when the Levites sang on Neginoth,
Going to Zion; their rough blasphemies
Were mediated through God's heart of joy,
And coming that way to me were made clean,
As all things are made clean. God is the Boy
Of love and laughter. God is never seen
By those who hate or snarl or sneer or frown;
God is not heard by those who have grown old;
God has no sceptre, throne nor jeweled crown;
He is not found on Fields of Cloth of Gold
Where kings may caper and their lords may lie:
God is the gladness of a little child,
The sudden interest of a baby's eye,
God is of life most joyously beguiled.

*

Forgive this trick of my too much delaying.
Critics have talk, I know, about their art,
And storm against the preaching and the praying

Of Browning and of Blake. They cry, "No part
 Have we with dialectics—be objective!"
 I have my thoughts about all Pharisees,
 Who limit soul to form. Can God's perspective
 Grow in your canvas? Paint your clump of trees
 And let them be but branches, leaves and bark;
 Leave out the soul, you matter-minded fellows,
 Make trees trees, be objective, cold and stark—
 Squirt on your mess of blues and reds and yellows;
 But let me paint September goldenrod,
 And trees, and birds, and men and everything
 As I behold them in the ecstasy of God,
 Above your chatter and your bickering.
 I would not want to write about Bill Boram,
 Were I not held by that which I have seen
 In him and others. How could I ignore him,
 By only telling? So much lies between
 Events. Was it not once said long ago,
 By one whose words are life-fermenting leaven,
 "To you within the gate I give to know
 The secret of the happiness of heaven?"

.

Come back to Bill. What went on in the cabin
 Those days and nights of nursing? It was said
 By Oram Hiltz, the mate, "Begod! Bill's grabbin'
 A holt on heaven. Sure's hell he's off his head!
 Nary a cuss word, b'ys, but like a woman
 He is with G'arge. . . . G'arge lies thar in Bill's bunk
 An' gettin' fat, begod! . . . Don't know what's comin'"

Over our Bill. Somehow he's lost his spunk,
Likewise his knack o' swearin' . . . Don't seem right
Fer Bill ter be like that, now does it, fellers?
Yer knows that book o' Bill's, ther one wi' bright
Brass corners, print in greens an' reds an' yellers?
Well he sits thar be G'arge and holds ther book
As it wuz holy, readin' erbout gardens
An' sich stuff. Every now an' then he'll look
Quite queer an' mutter, 'Master!' . . . When hell
 hardens

Over wi' five foot o' ice an' thar is skatin'
Ercross the bottomless pit, I'll think it not
So funny as our Bill, the son o' Satan,
Turned angel. . . . B'ys, I tells yer this thing's got
Me on the beam erwash from starn to scupper!
An' that's not all, fer G'arge is not ther same.
Thar's times he looks like Jesus at ther Supper. . . .
Yer knows it, I fergets the painter's name. . . .
Some Dago done it . . . but begod, it's great!
Well, that's what I've seen G'arge look like. His eyes
On Bill has onderstandin'. . . . As I'm mate
O' this green tub, G'arge sometimes looks so wise,
I'd swear Lord Christ hisself was thar instead
O' Coonrad! . . . Funny, too, this al'uz happens
When Bill sits readin' o' his book wi' red,
Green, yellor prints o' flowers an' garden mappin's!"

At first Bill came on deck avoiding us.
His word was spoken in an even tone.
He did not any longer foam and fuss

And rage and swear. His face was like a stone
For lack of feeling, and his gaze went past
Our curious eyes, as he walked down and up
His quarter-deck, or leaned against the mast,
Sucking a pipe with bowl big as a cup
And filled with cut Macdonald's. Though we muttered
Between ourselves and watched him standing there,
We dared not speak to Bill, so left unuttered
Our idle words. We felt the power of prayer
Upon Bill Boram had set his soul afire
With terrible torment that would last until
God had destroyed the devil of desire
To ghostly ashes in the heart of Bill.
The man's pride made him lonely, made him mute.
He knew that there was laughter, there was scorn,
At him among the men. He knew the brute
He gave them waited now with lowered horn
Or dripping tusk. He knew that he must meet
The bull and lion with the bleeding lamb.
He knew salvation would not be complete
Till Was and Will-Be had become I Am!

George Conrad came back painfully to health,
For Bill had almost killed him with the kick
He gave him underneath his heart. With wealth
Of tenderness, amazing us, the thick
Hard hands of Boram paid in full the score
Writ down against him by the pen of God.
Bill's drug-kit slowly emptied of its store
Of arnica and bandages and odd

Assortments of quinine and rhubarb root;
For George had fever and he raved of things
That live on horror—bat-like things that loot
Their prey in darkness—forms of fangs and stings.

All this the mate told us from time to time,
And well we listened 'neath the fo'c'sle lamps.
He told how George saw scaly monsters climb
Out of the clock and cried, "Them beasties champs
Ther bloody jaws at me!" Once in the bevel
Of Bill's round mirror, in a deep red glow,
George said he saw a short-horned bull-faced devil
With harpoon tail and hoof-like cloven toe.
"An' strangest part o' all this rage an' ravin',
Is Bill's—our Bill's—peculiar way wi' him.
It makes no difference how G'arge is behavin',
Bill's like a woman wit' a baby's whim!"

The weeks went by, and then we had our wish—
Full cargo; for the Lottie's water line
Was now well down; she floundered, like a fish
Caught in the shallows where the kelp-stalks shine,
And blown about the belly. Half a gale
Had hit the Banks and blackened all the sea
That broke in wisps of white, when we set sail
For harbor and for home. How merrily,
The capstan squealed and cluttered with the chains
Coiling below the hatch, as we went round
Singing against the anchor! Chantey-strains
Were lifted from our throats: "The Ship's Home-
bound";

“’Tis when you’re out to sea, my boys” . . . “Boston” . . .
“The Crew of the Sary Ann” . . . “Here’s hell-fer-
blazes” . . .
“The Lowlands Low” . . . “The Captain’s Gall”
. . . “Lost on
The Lady Elgin” . . . “Sink the Cook that Lazes”—
This last I wrote and taught the men to sing
At George’s cost, when, drinking at The Belle,
We taunted him with our bull-bellowing
Of fog-horn voices from the throats of hell.

Bill stood abaft the wheel and urged us on
In his old-time deep thunder, but his words
Commanded—there were now no oaths. The dawn
Rose with the Lottie’s sails that flashed like birds
In flight down green-comb hollows off the shore.
Close on the wind, the Lottie met the blast
Cold from the North, wallowed, then filled and bore
Away on her long tack. The men made fast
Her hatches, cleared the decks and roped their dories
In tiers of three along her bulwarks, then
Began their lilting chanties—old song-stories
Of black-eyed Susans and their sailor men.
The sun was like a scimiter within
Its sultan’s pearl-gray sash; changed and became
A monstrance lifted by a priest for sin,
High over heads bowed at the Holy Name.
Down her far path of silver sunrise-glow,
The Lottie poured, her snapping topsails set
Above a bellying of drifted snow—

Main, foresail, jib—her sheeted canvas wet
With white spume from her yellow bowsprit flying.
She seemed homesick for havens far away—
The curving Cove beneath the red roofs lying
Within the Ledge that barriers the Bay.
She seemed to dance and sing upon the sea,
Like some brown wind-blown breathless fisher lass
Who runs to meet her man, expectantly
And mad for kisses, when the white sails pass
Down avenues of wharves until they home
At anchor. Hers was such a haste of love
That one could feel her tremble through the foam,
Her wild soul singing as she swayed above
Green hills and hollows of gray horizons
Of water ridged with sudden crests of snow.
She seemed a queen, and we her myrmidons,
Of some lost empire in the long ago.

I think the Lottie's spirit spoke to Bill
And gave him comfort: wild met with the wild,
Strong with the strong, laughter with laughter, till
Joy like the gladness of a little child
Shone in his eyes and took the downward curve
Out of his mouth. This much we saw,
Yet dared not speak to him. We sought to serve
Our captain in a thousand things, but awe
Of what had happened held us by an arm
More terrible than steel. We still had hope
That when we made port, Bill would find the charm
Of Kate and cards, and all the dirty dope

With which we soiled ourselves, potent as ever;
So waited with a growing grin and nod,
And pledged ourselves to uttermost endeavor
Of getting Bill out of the hands of God—
God? He stood in the way of our intent,
And so we hated Him. God wanted Bill—
Well then, let God see to it, circumvent
Us if He could; since God gave man a will,
Man must forever be in full rebellion.
Against God, though he pay eternal pain,
And offer up himself to every hellion
Lest he adore The Lamb for sinners slain!

And what of me—the man who writes this story?
Strange that I saw so much and failed the vision,
Strange that my moment of the mystic glory
Faded above the Valley of Decision!
Yet it is told how Christ came down the hill
With beauty on his white transfigured face,
And John and James and Peter could not still
The raving of a child, though Jesu's grace
Had shone forth through his garments on their sight;
So hard it was for them to use that power
Which comes in morning moments on the height.
It is not easy to retain the hour
Of God in gardens or the mountain peak;
The soul that trembles to a perfect tone,
Aches ever after and is doomed to seek
Until that moment has been made its own.
So I was struggling in that binding mesh—

Desire—which custom throws to catch the spirit,
Then chokes it with the fingers of the flesh;
I wanted heaven, yet dreaded to draw near it.

.

The days went by, of many kinds of weather:
Days that were dull with smothering of fog
Through which the Lottie, driving hell-for-leather,
Howled with her horn like any lonely dog;
Days that were sunshine on a sea of beryl;
Days that were dirty with wet gusty squalls
Heaving the schooner over; days of peril,
When Bill stood at the wheel in overalls
And slicker, holding the Lottie to the wind,
Close reefed, and taking in the sea so fast
We had to work the pumps until we skinned
Our fingers to the bone; the danger past,
We tumbled down the fo'c'sle, yelled for George,
Who, being healed, returned that he might serve
Old savory dishes that we loved to gorge—
Fish chowder, plum duff, dumplings—his chef-
d'œuvre—

Washed down with coffee. No one thought to tease
George. Bill had spoken once for him to us.
He spoke in such a manner as to freeze
Blood in your heart to hear twice, made no fuss,
Said merely, "Men, who mocks this man mocks me!"
And turned his back without another word.

George came back to the fo'c'sle suddenly,
The night the laboring Lottie nearly foundered;

Her topmast went and then her foresail split
And left her helpless—how she threshed and floundered,
While we worked in the dark deep as the pit
Of Tophet! With the break of day was change
Of wind, and we, all wan and hungry, went
Down fo'c'sle; there was George before his range,
And with hot chowder, ready for the spent
Poor fellows who could only look their thought
And their amazement. After that came Bill—
Haggard, remote but stern, and said, "I've brought
You back my mate; let no man do him ill,"
And added, "Men, who mocks this man, mocks me!"
So George came back to serve us as of old;
And in his eyes a most sweet mystery
Of love grew, like a shepherd's for the fold.

Bill's word was like a sword of fire that moved
Forever up and down between the cook
And his old-time tormentors, and it proved
Sufficient safeguard for his friend; the look
In Bill's eyes when he spoke and turned away
Was hand upon the hilt of that same sword.
Besides the grub was good. No one could say
Aught against George's cooking. When he poured
Coffee for us it was like paschal wine,
And when hot biscuits were upon the plate,
New brotherhood began, and *me* and *mine*
Were lost in *you* and *yours*. Love did create
God in the sacrament of drink and bread;
And through the Lottie's creaking deck there came

Once more, anointing every humble head,
The heart-red tongues of Pentecostal flame!

These things we knew not then, but after time
Led us to understanding. Some few felt
Power in George. A light that was sublime
Shone from his eyes. We knew him when he knelt
To feed his fire, for he was like a saint
Whom glory haloes. Something in his face
Belonged to fire that purifies the taint
Of Adam's sin and leaves instead Christ's grace.
Strangest of all, his reedy gander voice
Changed to a lovely sound. The foolish chin
Was now no longer vapid—purpose, choice,
Decision made it royal. From within
Something mysterious and beautiful
Looked forth, molded the man and made of him
One who was lordly and most masterful—
As one who walks at ease with seraphim.

.
“His Arctic loneliness has turned his head!”
Will one say? Then I answer back, “My friend,
Have you not met the resurrected dead?
They walk now in your streets, and they ascend
From Olivets that rise beyond your wall.
The Resurrection and the Life may turn
You any moment from the burial
Of old dead selves in some ancestral urn,
To meet His gladness grouped about by lilies
In long lost gardens found by you again,

That He may tell you what God's holy will is,
And send you forth for singing songs to men—
Songs of the soul that lives and never dies;
Songs of the stars, the moon, and royal sun;
Songs of the angels shouting in the skies
For all that God, the Lord of life, has done.
Why will you scrabble on the earth for straws,
And ache for beauty in a mirrored face?
Your soul is worth more than the hips and haws
For which you sell it in the market place.
I say your soul's the only worthy thing,
That you are here to demonstrate its worth;
And every beggar is an uncrowned king
More royal than the emperors of earth.
I say that there is nothing in Lord God
That is not beating bravely in your heart;
He made you in His likeness from the clod,
And you are Christ's eternal counterpart.

.

The sun was standing over Scander Shoals
When we drove past the roaring ledge that bars
Bay Scander from The Cove. Under bare poles,
Bill sent the Lottie to The Belle with jars
That shook her to the kelson as she struck
The splintered spruce piles, while her hawsers flew
Like loons above lake water. Johnny Tuck
Stood ready on the wharf to catch and clew
The hawsers as they came, helped by Jim Snair
Who always hobbled down in time to fill

A pipe from my tobacco. "Make fast, there,"
Came up so quietly to them from Bill
That Johnny gaped and said, "Well, I'll be damned!"
And Jim looked at him from the derrick beam
Stared, coughed and spit and said, "Well, I'll be
damned!"

They were as men who babble in a dream,
For they were wont to hear Bill laying out
In thundered blasphemies at God and men,
As he brought up the Lottie to the stout
Piles of the Belle Mahone, so wondered, when
Bill spoke them calmly. They were first to know
Of Bill's conversion, and the first to tell
Kate Coolin and the girls dolled up to show
The Lottie's crew the broad highroad to hell.

"Bill's split his tops'ls, b'ys," Kate Coolin giggled,
"I'll mend them fo' him, jest you neva' fear.
He'll be a'right to-night when he has wriggled
A hoochie koochie, afta rum an' beer!"
And so they cackled like a lot of hens
Back in the barnyard, while Bill and the cook
Stood on the hill and listened to the wrens
And robins in the trees that overlook
Bill's garden and his house. Twilight was down,
In filmy lilac laces, on The Cove,
And dancing over fish-wharves gray and brown.
The steeple in the distance, held above
The house reek and the roofs the brave appeal
Of Christ our Saviour, glorious with gold.

The cross against the sky was like a seal
Upon a purple page for them unrolled,
And written with the promise of new life
That they must live forever who had found,
Out of old sorrow, bitterness and strife,
Christ in their love of beauty from the ground.
So had Christ come to them in love of flowers,
For Christ lies hidden in the things we find.
He comes down shouting with the April showers;
He leaps up with the lilies and their kind—
Those spears of flame that burn up through the sod,
Like little tongues of many colored fire,
And is at one with what goes up to God
In hearts that beat with mystical desire.
Christ is God's ecstasy of pure creation,
He is the artist in the soul of things,
The miracle of magical elation
That from creative impulse ever springs.
He who would know Christ must have done with pray-
ing,
Go forth and find him where the tangled vines are,
Meet him on hilltops where the winds are playing,
Or in the woods where hemlock, spruce and pines are.
He haunts all rivers and the back still waters,
Inlets of lakes and their tree-sheltered islands.
Christ runs with logs that roar down dark mill waters,
Until the great boom their last wet mad mile ends.
Christ comes through fog that weaves above The
Scander,
His wings spread straightly up and down the sky

Made blue for him; for Christ is the Commander
Of wind and sea and land, of things that fly
Or creep or grow. Christ is creative art,
The touch of God that gives existence soul,
Who is identified with every part
Of Nature, and yet crowns, completes the whole.

PART THREE

“A brute I might have been but would not sink
i’ the scale.”

—*Robert Browning.*

PART THREE

Vainly did Kate dance down beside the Lottie
The night that Bill and George went hillward home;
Vainly she raved, "B'ys, th' ol' man has gone dottie!
Come on, let's go ta him an' let us show 'm
We does not give a damn." Each shook his head,
Looked longingly at Bill's close shuttered loft,
And thought of nights that were forever dead.
Kate sneered, "The hull bunch o' you fella's soft—
Let's leave 'em, girls, they has become old women!"
She tossed her wild flamboyant hair and curved
Her red mouth at us. "Yes, they is old women
Fit fo' tha company o' cats. Bill's served
'Em dirty an' they has not got tha grit
To stand ag'in him." Then she turned aside
And left us wondering. No man saw fit
To follow Kate in her hot angry pride.
We stood beside the Lottie, at The Belle,
And counselled what we thought we'd better do.
Some were for going back to Bill's and tell
What Kate had said, urging, "O, he'll come through
Wi' rum an' cards, now that he's home again."
But most of us were hopeless, said, "No use—

Bill's changed—We'll have to hang together, men—
Let's go to Foxey Doolin's an' cut loose."

In days that followed, working, at the flakes,
Bill kept us busy till the cod were dried;
He spoke us kindly, said, "B'ys, for your sakes,
I wants to keep the Lottie an' divide
Her cargoes wit' you; but I goes no more
A sailin'—I is done wi' that. The patch,
An' what I has already saved in store
For rainy weather, my share o' the catch,
Will keep me from the poorhouse. Make the mate
Your captain, let Tom Blaylock have his place;
I'll work at home, my men, for you an' wait
Your comin' back again through Scander Race."

So while we sailed away Bill made The Belle
A house of happiness. He cleaned the floor
And washed the walls until the evil smell
That lingered there was now at last no more.
He opened up the loft and let the rafters
Arch over wide and window-lighted space
That gave the room a feeling of sweet laughter
Called thither by compulsion of its grace.
"For every dirty deed done here by me,"
Bill said to George, "I'll give back beauty, till
This house o' lies an' lust has come to be
Called 'House o' Joy.' " George answered, "Yer right,
Bill."

These things took place when we were on The Banks,
And later heard from Bill and George and Bob.
Meanwhile She Weasle's rubber-booted shanks
Failed not their mistress; busy on the job
Of taking her from door to door, they spread
News of the doings down below the hill.
"Bill Boram's jist gone crazy in his head,
De vay he's doin' tings. Say vat ya vill,
De Old Nick has him an' dat feller G'arge.
Dey's taken all de barrels an' de barrers
Out uv De Belle. I hears dey has a large
Polpit fer preachin'—'tink o' dat! Hell harrers
De ground an' Bill an' G'arge comes a'ter sowin'!
Does pa'son know dese doin's? I'll tell him den. . . .
Sorry, me child, can't stay—I must be goin'. . . .
Pete Snyder's drunk an' beat his wife ergen."

Across The Cove Kate hid her pride and jeered.
She said to Babbie Daniels, her best cronie,
"I knowed 'at it w'u'd come ta Bill—he's queered
Our fun wi' all his foolin' . . . Bab, if on'y
We'd git Bill drunk!"

At first, old Bobby Fox
Was puzzled, then he came to understand
What happened unto Bill and George—their talks
With him soon made things clear. He gave his hand
To each and said, "Boys, this is nothing new—
God rises up in us like sap in trees—
But how you must have paralyzed the crew!"

You got the Holy Ghost upon the seas;
Though I'm agnostic, that I must confess.
You're changed all right and have been cured o' fault
By something more than human, Bill, I guess—
You sound as if you had been reading Walt."

And Bill replied, "I never read a book
'Cept mine o' Botany. I does not care
For all that po'try stuff. Give me one look
On things like marigold an' maidenhair,
An' I'll get more o' beauty than the whole
Lot o' them rhymin' fellers ever saw.
Bob, I found this at last: Things has their soul
Which hides from us, accordin' to the law
O' beauty, as a woman hides each breast,
But gives 'em freely to the lips she loves.
Bad as I wuz, one thing in me wuz best —
The thoughts that come aflutter like the doves,
When I bent over flowers, touched the grass
Or lay at night a-listenin' to trees.
Things know'd I loved 'em, so it come to pass
That beauty beat me bloody on the seas."

Bob answered, "Certain as the sea is salt,
You've had your vision; but you do not know
That all you feel was felt and writ by Walt.
He footed down the highroad heel and toe,
Dancing his joy of beauty into words
Of tumult loud as old Niagara Falls,
Or softer than the little flights of birds

At feeding time. The whole creation calls
Through Walt. The stars are tangled in his beard.
He makes the moon his flappy wide-brimmed hat.
He wears the blue sky for a cloak. Men sneered
At Walt. Some argued this and others that.
But all the while they snorted, squealed and chattered,
Walt went his way. He had no time to tarry,
The seed of God was in his hand; he scattered
Widely and well until the world was starry."

Bill stared before he answered, stroked his chin,
And pondered: "Must 'a been a man like me,
Saved from a load o' lust an' dirty sin
By gettin' through the door; for, Bob, you see,
That's what's the matter wi' the world—the door
Shets on it. They's a door a'right—I knows
That much—it shets men out from seein' more
Than they is able. No one ever goes
Beyond this door until the time is come.
This door can't be kicked open. You must stand
An' wait your turn. No use to knock. They's some
Who taps an' taps an' taps wi' gentle hand;
They's some who knocks in quite a knowin' way;
They's some who kicks an' bangs; it ain't no use,
The door stays shet. You can't get through for pay.
You can't pass wit' a ticket. They's no loose
J'int in the panels for the peakin' eye.
The door stays shet to preachin' an' to prayin'.
I hears folks singin' 'In the Sweet Bye-an'-Bye,'
But they'll get left like stubble after hayin';

They ain't no Bye-an'-Bye upon a shore
All silver as wi' sand; they's Here-an'-Here,
Waitin' for 'em as passes through the door,
An' only then they'll read their title clear.
The door was shet on me an' I wuz bad
Bill Boram. Times an' times I heard an' seen
Sounds an' fair sights as through a fog. I had
A compass—love o' flowers an' the green
O' grass an' leaves—it kept me on the course;
But al'uz it wuz fog. I knowed somewhere
The land lay, but it wuz no use to force
A passage through the rocks. I did not dare
To make the harbor till the fog wuz lifted.
But oh them sights an' sounds! They tempted me.
They wuz like yaller dust o' gold that's sifted
From tons o' dirt. Strange how it comes to be
True of all precious things, that man must earn
Afore he spends! So I went on an' raised
Hell till my moment come. I used to turn
My back on beauty. Sometimes I wuz dazed,
An' run amuck o' life, did what I could
To damn my soul an' body; but the sight
An' sound o' beauty looped me like a good
Hemp hawser loops a pile. Mornin' an' night,
Somethin' held on hard a'ter me, until
I, who wuz counted worst o' men, an' swore,
Drank, gambled, lusted, sudden heard a still
Voice say, 'Bill Boram, go an' sin no more!'

.

That autumn, we came back and found The Belle
All beautiful with paint and window flowers.
The roof was red, the walls were white, and—well,
We did not know the place of evil hours
That we once knew. A narrow gangway ran
Left of the Lottie's mooring post and met
Bill's new road round the shore. It was his plan
To make the lower log house that was set
Above the rocks a storeroom for the fish.
"Can't have no more o' them smells here," he said.
"More work for all you fellers, but my wish
Must be obeyed." We grumbled, nodded head,
Winked eye, thumbed over shoulder, bit a chew
Of blackjack, stared at Bill and thought him crazy.
It seemed a foolish thing for us to do
As Bill commanded; and, then, we were lazy.
"What! cart ther cargo o' the Lottie S.
In barrers all that distance? I'll be damned!"
"What's come ter Bill?"

"Dunno."

"Sunstroke, I guess."

"Th' ol' shack's too small, o' course, an' will be
crammed
Ter bustin' . . . ain't no room below fer flakes. . . .
A hell o' time we'll have a dryin' cod!"

Kate rowed past, laughing, "Well, fo' tha land sakes,
Look at them fellas fetchin' fish, begod!"

With all our grumbling and our oaths at Bill,
We did as we were told. We worked that day
Unloading cargo, hardly stopped to fill
A pipe or bite a chew. The long gangway
Was slippery beneath our oily feet
That tramped between the Lottie and the shack.
With barely room for carriers to meet,
We strained, slipped, swore, unloaded, then came back.
At last when day was ending, and The Cove
Gleamed like an opal on a woman's throat,
Bill gathered us together; stood above
Our heads upon the bottom of a boat
Turned gunwale down for painting at The Belle,
And said, "Men, I has words to say to you.
You thinks I'm crazy. Some o' you can't tell
Jist what you thinks. Old things has changed to new,
An' you all hates the change. They ain't no more
Rum in the loft wi' playin' cards an' tables;
They ain't no dancin' on a dirty floor,
An' fightin' for a woman's mouth; the cable's
Cut an' no man c'n splice it, that is sartin;
But I has somethin' better'n what is gone—
Come round to-night, men—now is time for partin'—
Come round to-night, an' see what's goin' on."

So when the stars from their high heavenly places
Leaned over the blue edge of that deep abyss
We call the sky, to contemplate their faces
Mirrored within The Cove whose waters kiss
The saw-toothed rocks of roaring Scander Ledge,



Bill's company came. We came with oaths and
laughter

That signified rum—brown as frost-bit sedge
That grows above The Belle; we came on after
The drinks were done, with felt hats tilted back,
Hands in pants-pockets, swaggering to show
Our ease of manners, though the sudden crack
O' doom should sound for us to go below.

The Belle was lit with lanterns—Chinese kind
That swayed in splendor high among the rafters
From ropes through pulleys. It was hard to find
Two lanterns like; they shone with loves and laughs.
Long rows of ordered benches stood in aisles—
Benches with sloping backs, made from spruce deal—
Before a platform that was sweet with piles
Of potted ferns and flowers; one could feel
The spirit of those flowers in the air,
A pure invisible and welcome comer
Whose beauty haunted us like Helen's hair
That haunts the far-away dim hills of summer.

Bill stood within the door and gave a hand
To each of us, saying, "B'ys, come take a seat.
That you, Tom? . . . Here's Jake! . . . Jimmy! . . .
Ain't it grand
To have the b'ilin' o' you! . . . Hullo, Pete,
You ol' tarpaulin! . . . G'arge, look who's here—Jack
Barkhouse from No'th East! . . . Johnny wit' his
fiddle!

Come right in, Johnny—glad to see you back
From Coffin Island. . . . Gettin' fat o' middle,
Sam Publicover, pump the bellows more,
An' start redoocin'—quit the po'try stuff! . . .
Here's sight for sore eyes—gran'ther Jellenore! . . .
Say, guess this room's not nearly big enough."

So Bill met us, and George was standing by
All joy, and shaking hands and saying, "Now
Ain't I reel glad ter see yer! . . . seems as I
Can't get ernuff o' gladness, anyhow."
Just words—poor words—but on his happy face
There shone such dignity of man divine,
We felt a stranger-presence in that place,
Like Him Who turned the water into wine.
We felt and wondered and were overwhelmed
By beauty and by love and laughter, too,
As, when Sir Lohengrin, whom Arthur helmed,
Came to Brabant, the happy people knew
An overwhelming wonder. All our brag
And bluster blended into fine dismay
Of what we saw and heard. A great white flag
Festooned the platform table. To this day,
The picture has not dimmed, of Bobby Fox
At ease behind the table in the chair
He occupied at Bill's. His tangled locks
Were combed. His beard—a silver foam of hair—
Fell halfway down his breast and almost hid
The silver buttons on his frilled white front.
Gaping, we sat—not knowing what we did—

Forgetful of the oaths that were our wont.
Then Bobby rose, pulled at his beard, and spoke.
I have no memory of what he said.
I know that never sound that silence broke,
Zoned by his words, silence, the coveted
Possession of pure thought. He led us on
From plain to peak of that adventure shared
By God and man; told of the distant dawn—
Blood-red above the frozen fire—that flared
Along horizons of massed ice and snow;
Told us of man's emergence from the beast,
Of those first moments when his spirit's flow,
Poured forth in words of prophet and of priest.
He made us see the working of the law,
Until he had us cheering, "Go it, Bob!" . . .
"We likes this stuff." . . . "You're Johnny on the
jaw!" . . .
"Damned, but 'e talks as if 'e knowed 'is job!" . . .

When Bob was done, Bill stood and spoke to us:
"B'ys, I knowed you'd like Fox's booky stuff,
An' I perposes that we at once discuss
Plans for our nights when winds is rough,
An' we has made it cozy in The Belle
Wi' lots o' lamps an' books an' magerzines
An' papers. . . . Come, cut loose an' break the spell
O' silence. Fox has knocked to smithereens
Them fables that made Bible a poor book,
An' opened wide the pages o' the sky

For all to read. There's lots to talk. Here's cook—
He'll tell you things you never knowed nor I."

Then George came on the platform as we cheered.
He looked at us. He held us with his eyes.
He spoke: "I never knowed how much I feared
Love, fellers, till ternight. How much truth lies
In lovin'! all ther wisdom o' ther world
Bides in man's friendship. Nothin' counts so much
As fellership. The biggest sea as hurled
Itself ag'in ther Scander Shoals can't touch
Th' immartal might o' lovin'. . . . Come on now, b'ys,
Let's cap this everlutin' light o' love,
An' git ourselves erquainted wit' ther skies,
Until ther Lard's erlivin' in Ther Cove."

"Damned if I don't believe them fellers mean
What they has said," cried raptured Johnny Deal,
As he felt for his fiddle in the green
Wool bag that held it. "Say, yer makes me feel
Fine!"

"Me, too, as my name's Sam Publicover!"
The poet yelled, as he clasped hands with Johnny.
"Come, start yer tune, b'y; gif us 'Jolly Rover,'
Er let us haf 'Maxvelton's Braes is Bonny.'"

"Come, Johnny!" Bill called, "Let's us have the fiddle,
We means to make o' music one more beauty

Sent to the world. Most everythin' 'sa riddle,
An' it ain't easy for to do your duty,
Till you has learned the law o' God from flowers,
An' sounds o' wind on waves or treetops singin';
Life is most always hell, until the hours
Smells like the grass or sounds like joy-bells ringin'."

So Johnny Deal stood forth alone and played.
He played as he had never played before.
He seemed to be in robes of sound arrayed.
Like intermittent falls of rain that roar
On house-roofs with the wind or lull to weep
Like women for remembered woes, he swept
The gamut of sensation; till the deep
Answered to deep. His tapping right foot kept
Time to the living bow and vibrant strings.
The Belle was full of faces that were framed
In arches of tip-touching colored wings
Above a swirl of folding clouds that flamed.

.

All this seems now so very far away,
And few will feel what I feel as I write.
I only know that soon another day
Broke on The Cove. That winter every night
Found all the Lottie's crew met at The Belle
To hear Bob talk of Nature and of man;
To listen while Bill Boram stood to tell
His story of the flowers. The rumor ran
That Parson Blaylock turned aside to see

What went on in his house of Beelial;
But I had quarreled with him, and to me,
Home was not home; and so I heard the call
Of voices in my veins and shipped to go
North on a cruise—mate of The Flying Scud.
The rumor ran that he was vexed to know
How heresy held sway: “Man made from mud!
Who then is Christ? I tell you, Robert Fox,
Salvation hangs on Christ’s redeeming cross.
Man fell from grace, and Adam’s error blocks
The road to heaven. There is eternal loss
For souls unless they have been justified
By Faith. God looks on mortal man in wrath,
When man pleads not the Victim Crucified
And owns that nothing in his hands he hath.”

Last time I heard from home they said that Bill
Holds nearly all The Cov’ers in his hand;
That drink and revelry no longer fill
The Lottie’s crew with lust. I understand
That Bill and George and Bob have organized
A reading room within The Belle Mahone,
Where there are always talks and improvised
Music from Johnny’s fiddle. All alone,
Poor Kate sits at her window, rails and sneers
At Bill to passers-by. She will not yield;
Her wilful soul is adamant, appears
Seldom upon the road beyond her field
That foams in June with white and wind-blown daisies.
She Weasel still goes in her rubber boots,

Clacking from door to door; but no one raises
A welcome eyebrow at her word. Dried roots
Are now all that survive her thorns of scandal;
For Conrad's eyes and laughter have prevailed
On hatred and suspicion. She is a vandal-
Lost and discounted by those whom she flailed
Hard with her tongue. Yet I suspect that she,
Kate and the Parson and the few who hold
Bill crazy, George a fool, will come to see
What I have found through thinking: Smelted gold
Out of the quartz of Nature in the Christ
Who stands at red door of the heart and knocks
What time the lilacs in their purple mist
Mark April from the month of hollyhocks.

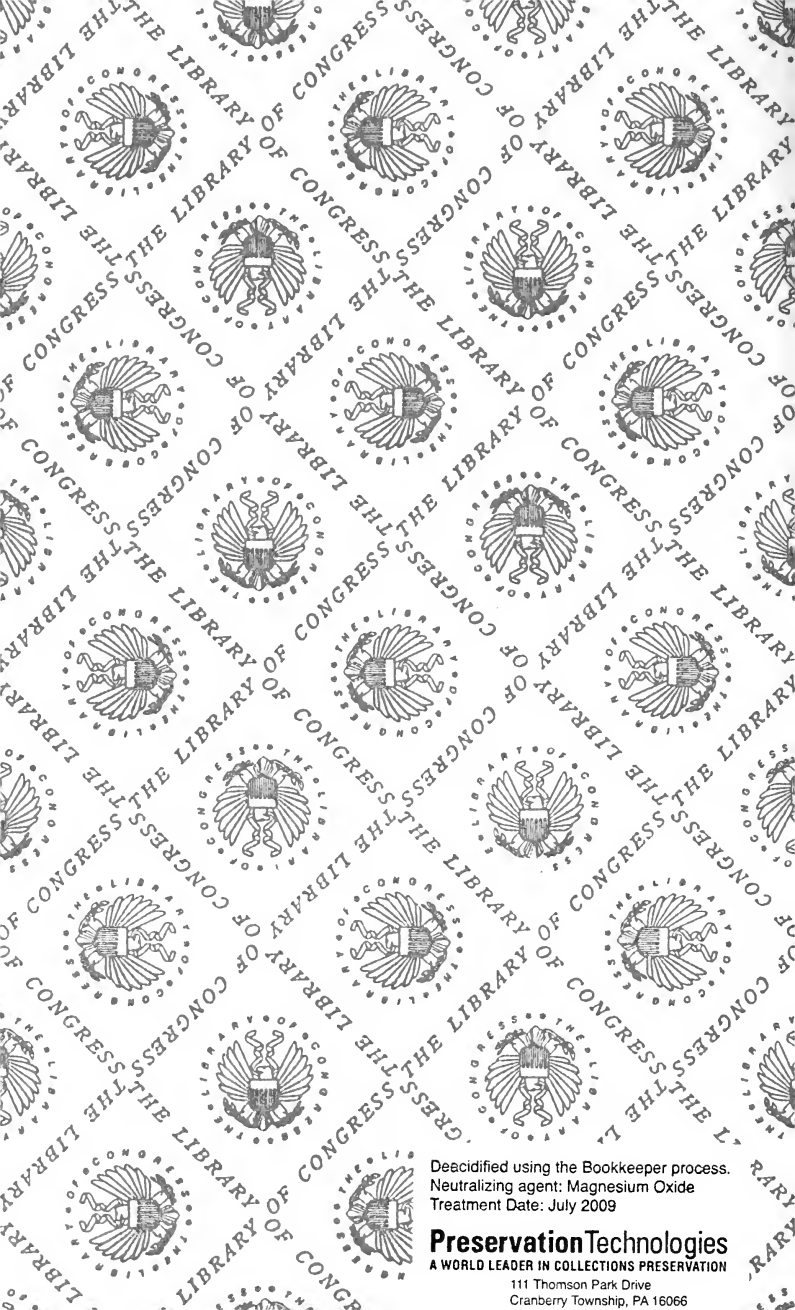
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O beauty of the autumn days that die,
O magic of the wind and shout of seas,
O lifting of the little wings that fly,
O marvel of gay blossoms and the trees!
Join with the miracle of human hearts,
The tender touching of all friendly hands,
Until the figured veil of Nature parts
To show how near to flesh the spirit stands.
Come, love of life, and lift the gate that bars
Man from his lost dominion of all things;
And let there be a going up to stars
With tumult of his long unfolded wings.

.

My story ends. The polar night is breaking.
What do you think, my friend, of bad Bill Boram?
To me this Northern sky with song is shaking—
The song of Christ: "O come, let us adore him!"

THE END



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